

450 YEARS OF MERCHANT TAYLORS' SCHOOL 1561 -2011

A look back at the place where the School began

SUFFOLK LANE 1561-1875

The first building occupied by this school was that originally built in the reign of Edward III and later occupied by the de la Pole family, Dukes of Suffolk. This was seized by Henry VII following the flight from England of John de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk - the "White Rose of York" - the Yorkist male pretender in 1501.

The name "Manor of the Rose" became attached to the mansion (and, of course, it was revived for the boarding house at Sandy Lodge in 1933), which was subsequently owned by a succession of aristocratic owners, including Edward, Duke of Buckingham, and receives a brief mention in Shakespeare's Henry VIII.

"Not long before your highness sped to France
The Duke, being at the Rose, within the parish
St. Lawrence Poulteney, did of me demand
What was the speech among the Londoners
Concerning the French journey"

The mansion was divided into several lots and only part of the site was bought by the Merchant Taylors' Company in 1561 for the accommodation of the newly-founded school. We know little of its appearance

The original building was destroyed on 2nd September 1666, the first day of the Great Fire of London, although two undercrofts survived into the nineteenth century and are illustrated in Wilson's History of the Parish of St. Laurence Pountney, published in 1814.

The School was conducted in various rented premises around the city until the new building was constructed on the Suffolk Lane site in 1674-5. The post Fire building was designed by Robert Hooke whose

full role the re-building of the City churches is receiving belated recognition.

The Great Schoolroom was a long, wide room (about 85 by 30 feet) with benches down the sides and the monitor's table and prompter's benches at one end. In the nineteenth century a raised dais was erected for Speech Day and other days of commemoration. By the mid-nineteenth century the buildings were rather dilapidated, cramped and darkened by the warehouses and other commercial buildings which surrounded them.

The 1864 report on the four great London schools of the Public Schools Commission drew attention to the cramped school buildings, although its description of them as "good" might seem puzzling! Increased accommodation was recommended and this accorded with the recommendations to the Court of the Head Master, James Augustus Hussey. During 1866 the premises of the former Charterhouse School (which had moved to the country to continue as a boarding school), just outside the City in Clerkenwell, were purchased by the Company. New buildings were constructed there and the school was re-opened on 6th April 1875.

The buildings at Suffolk Lane were demolished, and the site has been occupied by several buildings since then. However, the new Prudential Corporation building bears a plaque commemorating the former site of the School. Suffolk Lane and Laurence Pountney Hill retain a surprising number of buildings familiar to earlier generations of this school's scholars, whilst the streets are still cobbled. The area is well worth a visit.